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WOMEN IN MUNICIPAL ACTIVITIES

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Someone has described the evolutionary progress of humanity as the migration of a great unorganized horde, sometimes wandering this way, sometimes that, but always keeping in a general forward direction. From the mass appear a few individuals, who, by reason of their ability to see ahead, assume the guidance of and give a certain bent to the migration. But women have seldom enjoyed the exercise of such leadership. It is true, in times of confusion, a woman here or there has found herself in the front ranks, as did Joan d'Arc or Queen Elizabeth, but however well she acquitted herself, her achievements failed to open the way for women. She was an accident and regarded as such.

Woman's place in the crowd of a generation ago was immediately back of her masculine kinsfolk. Here she enjoyed protection from the rough elbowing of the crowd, though in return for this shelter she forfeited her liberty and was expected to devote all of her physical strength and mental energy to pushing some particular masculine protector to the front. Sometimes her efforts were appreciated, frequently they were taken for granted, since etiquette favored a covert manner of pushing. But the rules of the game have changed. Partners and co-laborers are taking the places of lords and masters. Farmers, professors, clergymen, politicians, in fact, husbands of every calling are coming to see the advantage of having a wife beside, instead of behind, them. They now take pride in the wife who enjoys an outlook on the world which enables her to help far more intelligently and effectively than did the wife of a generation ago.

It is a very similar change that has taken place in the work of women out of the home. As long as they were the hard-working secretaries or deputies of public officials, the phenomenon of women in public life was scarcely noticed. Now that they are emerging from obscurity and are becoming visible in the front ranks, their appearance is hailed as a radical change in the order of things. Such an assumption is, of course, absurd. It is a very short, though con-

spicuous step, that women lately have taken. If women, as a class, had ever been the helpless, shallow creatures they were supposed to have been, they could never now assume their new responsibilities so completely, and take their places as executives and leaders so easily. Nor can there be much pessimism regarding their success in the work which they have been doing for a comparatively long time, but in doing which they have only lately come under observation. Women are now doing openly and frankly what they formerly did stealthily and in secret. And men, who a few years ago would have hesitated to acknowledge the intellectual equality of the sexes, are now inviting this open coöperation.

It is to accomplish certain results in municipal endeavor that has most generally brought women out of their obscurity and forced them to act in organization. While the family may be the basic institution of society, the community environment to a very great extent determines its success or failure. Women have followed where reason led, and have seen that the municipal organization had to do with things it was essential should be well done if their efforts as mothers were not to be negated. The water pumped to their houses, the street, the alley, the school, the hospital, the street car, the park, are all powerful aids to the development of a healthy and enlightened family life, if they are well managed; but they are also agencies for evil, if poorly managed. Typhoid water, dirty and dark streets, unguarded crossings, ill-ventilated and poorly lighted schools, mismanaged hospitals, street cars unequipped with safety devices, unpoliced parks, are all capable of destroying the product of years of patient effort on the part of mothers. In the humanitarian activities of the community, the almshouses, foundling asylums, and institutions for custodial care, women have seen that functions traditionally theirs were not invariably performed to their satisfaction by their male successors. Reason and sympathy have combined to force women to assert themselves. That the justice as well as expediency of their demands has been obvious is shown by the comparative ease with which they have acquired the municipal franchise in so many places.

Outside the use of the ballot, women have made effective their demands in two ways—one in organized groups of citizens watching the office-holder, and letting him know that he is being watched, offering suggestions, and endorsing the official who succeeded; the

other as office-holders, actually doing the job from the woman's point of view.

In the first of the ways women have adopted, they have been very successful. Using an instrument, the woman's club, formerly devoted to concerns less practical and vital, remaining to a large extent non-partisan, demanding of all office-holders efficient administration, they have become powerful moulders of public opinion regarding the questions in which they have interested themselves. Through the woman's club, they have studied their problems with a seriousness and application that could not fail to bring results, and through the power that organization creates, they have forced recognition of their views. Publicity campaigns have been carried on with vigor and resourcefulness. When women have once become convinced that something vital to their homes is at stake, it is a waste of breath to talk about political expediency.

Of late the clubs have broadened their interests to include municipal activities, less obviously though no less really connected with the home than those enumerated above. They are studying tax assessments, city planning, charter revision, in fact everything that their municipal government is going or proposes to do. As a result of this study, they are demanding, where it seems necessary, a logical expansion of municipal endeavor. If schools are seen to be avenues of contagion, adequate school medical inspection is demanded by the clubs. If the city has municipal markets, the clubs are demanding efficient supervision over the foodstuffs offered for sale. If the city supervises the milk supply, the clubs are ready to pass an intelligent judgment upon what is being done; and when in all of these matters the city fathers evade issues by talking learnedly of finance, the clubs, armed with information, are ready to bring them back to the point. After such education and experience as this, women cannot go back to the old individualistic conceptions, even if they would; what was once an experiment is now a duty.

The salutary effect which the clubs have had through their non-partisan scrutiny of public officials has been so great that this phase of their activity is being rapidly developed. The California Civic League, the Civic Club and the Woman's League for Good Government in Philadelphia, Chicago's Committee of a Hundred, are typical of this departure. It was the absence of such interest and coöperation on the part of citizens a few years ago that allowed our American municipalities to fall into such evil ways.

In the second of the methods—namely, office-holding—by which women are making effective their demand for government that will conserve their interests, the avenues of approach have been opened in several ways. Foremost among these has been the merit system or civil service for appointment to municipal positions. As long as appointments to offices can be made from purely political motives, women in the male-suffrage states are practically excluded. Where offices mean votes, indirect influence is usually at a discount. When, however, it is no longer a question of “taking care of the boys” or of accommodating a ward leader, and officers are chosen because they can demonstrate their fitness, it becomes inevitable that women will qualify and secure appointments, though it sometimes requires a little time for a thorough-going application of the new principle. The situation in Philadelphia is fairly typical of the United States generally. In regard to it, Mr. Lewis H. Van Dusen of Philadelphia reports:

When the civil service commission, of which I am a member, came into office in December, 1911, and for sometime thereafter, it was the custom to admit to the examinations only men, unless it was specifically provided in any special case that women might enter. Under that plan women, of course, were permitted to participate in examinations for stenographers, clerks, nurses, and other similar positions, but early in the year 1913 our commission completely reversed this procedure and ordered that all examinations for all positions whatsoever be open to men and women alike unless specifically otherwise provided, and we have continued up to date admitting women to all examinations regardless of whether there was a likelihood for their appointment or not. . . . In other words, since the early part of 1913 men and women have competed in all cases upon exactly the same basis in our examinations.

That this means more than a merely theoretical equality is abundantly proven when Mr. Van Dusen still further reports that in the “last examination for the highest grade general clerical positions, salary \$1,250 to \$1,600 per year, the proportion of women who competed successfully was considerably greater than the proportion of men who competed successfully.” Efficiency is in too great demand for such a condition as this not to lead to the logical results.

The debt women owe civil service is not confined to its having opened the doors of opportunity to them. Because of its exercise of selection among women on the basis of experience and capacity, it has assured their success in the critical beginning period. It is

very doubtful whether women would have made the progress which they have made had the advance guard been chosen in a hit or miss fashion.

Coördinate with the opportunities through civil service have come the demands for women's services to perform the new functions which city, state and federal government have undertaken. With the change from the old ideal of as little government as possible to the new ideal of government as an active, positive agency of community welfare, the services of many kinds of people are being required. And among these new workers are women. Although there are many things that women cannot do, there are many that they can do equally as well as men, and there are a few which only they can do. And while it is true that it is largely as a result of the demands of the women citizens that much of this social service has been assumed, once assumed, it is practically impossible to carry it on without women. One can scarcely imagine, for instance, a court of domestic relations, a bureau of child hygiene, a hospital social service department, a recreation centre, a juvenile court, being run without women. And we are rapidly coming to see that a police system without women is bound to fall short of what we expect of that branch of the public service. Twenty-three cities have police-women, Chicago leading the list with twenty. In Portland, Oregon, Tacoma, Washington, and Oakland, California, there are departments of public safety for women and children.

It is not only in the field work that municipal social service has given women a chance. It has been an effective entering wedge for securing recognition for them on municipal commissions and boards of trustees which supervise these activities. This reaction seems to be general throughout the greater part of the United States. In Boston, women have generous representation among the trustees of the city's public educational, charitable and reformatory institutions, though in the city's many other activities, but one woman has been thus recognized. The appointment of Dr. Katharine B. Davis as commissioner of correction for New York City is characteristic of this new welfare movement. It is expected that her department will be transformed so far as is possible from an organization for meting out punishment to one worthy of its name.

There are other kinds of municipal service, not exclusively women's work, for which, however, they are well adapted. Typical

of these are inspectorships of streets, markets, garbage collection and similar activities. As a garbage inspector in Chicago, Jane Addams showed what efficiency and conscientiousness could accomplish when she secured the removal of eighteen inches of filth and refuse from a paved street, even though her achievement did not astonish the Italian neighbors, who, as she points out, were accustomed to seeing buried cities exhumed. At present, the Rev. Caroline Bartlett Crane is leading the van of women food experts; Miss Mildred Chadsey of Cleveland, Ohio, has set the furthest point of advancement for women sanitarians; Prof. Emily G. Balch has won a position of leadership in city planning in Boston.

Of the new fields which are opening up for women none is more interesting nor offers work more fundamental to a successful civic development than the position as tax assessor. Taxes touch people in such a vulnerable spot, and a just and efficient system of assessment is so essential to public welfare, that if women succeed as tax assessors, they will have met and solved one of the most delicate problems in government. They are now being tried in Spokane, Los Angeles and Chicago. The chances of their success are considerably enhanced by the experience in judging the value of goods which women have acquired in the household.

And finally, the franchise itself has flung wide the doors of public office to women. Where women vote, they hold offices quite regardless of whether the work to be performed is "womanly" or not. In cities and in villages, in the woman-suffrage communities, they have been elected to every kind of municipal position, even including the mayoralty itself. When, in 1913, Denver adopted a commission form of government, it had in office a woman recorder, Lucy I. Harrington, who was retained to perform the same work, though the title of her position has been changed. Denver also has a woman, Ellis Meredith Clement, president of its elections commission, which has complete control over all elections held in the city and county of Denver. Kansas City has a woman, Laura A. Jost, city treasurer. San Diego, California, has a woman, Miriam E. Rains, city recorder. Chicago has a woman, Anna E. Nichols, secretary of the civil service commission. Out of the seventy-two members of the commissions which have administrative direction of the city departments of Los Angeles, nineteen are women. That these are not confined to the purely social service activities is proven in the case of Mrs. D. C.

McCan who is vice-president of the civil service commission and a member of the efficiency commission.

Running parallel with the municipal activities of women have been similar developments in state and nation. Here, as in the cities, women have exerted powerful influence in securing legislative provision for the enterprises in which they are interested. They have taken positions in state and federal government very similar to those taken by women in municipal activities. If the progress of humanity in general has been that of an unorganized horde, such a condition does not characterize the progress of women within the last two decades. Organized, alert, and trained, they are far more nearly described as being that of a drilled army, if one may use a military metaphor to describe a group of people traditionally the enemies of war.